



THE OREGON
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

Children's Dental Health

February 2005

A Report for the Walker Fund Advisory Committee of
The Oregon Community Foundation

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Overview

A philosophy of prevention, intervention, and integration into general health are themes with all wellness initiatives. Children’s dental health research and policy proposals follow these same paths toward wellness.

“Ultimately, education and prevention will be the linchpins in eliminating, or at least minimizing, untreated dental disease. The day that we as a nation decide to provide oral health education to families of newborns, public health measures such as community water fluoridation, and regular dental visits to every American will mark the birth of the first generation that could grow up essentially free of dental disease. Until that occurs, the nation will be challenged to meet the needs for preventive and restorative care among large numbers of Americans who do not have dental coverage, cannot afford care or face other challenges that prohibit them from seeking regular oral care and dental visits.” (American Dental Association, 2004)

Prevention and Intervention

Oral Health Education

Awareness of the issues surrounding prevention, recognition, and referral for oral disease may be achieved through multiple means. Media campaigns that utilize already developed, culturally appropriate and free materials is a cost-effective approach.

Targeting high-risk communities and populations groups such as pregnant women, parents and caregivers of infants, low-income families, and isolated families utilizes funds efficiently and reaches people who might not otherwise be aware of oral health practices.

Integrating young children’s dental health awareness, screening, and linkages to services into systems and programs such as Head Start, Healthy Start, Relief Nurseries, and other family support and child development programs will raise awareness and facilitate access.

Other natural “touch points” for reaching families include WIC, pediatrician’s offices, immunization clinics, and public schools. Creating a culture of prevention practices reduces more costly treatment of dental disease.

Fluoride

For over 50 years, the American Dental Association has endorsed the fluoridation of community water supplies, as well as the use of other age-appropriate products containing fluoride as safe and effective prevention measures. Projects may promote the

use of fluoride products and procedures for children through public and parent education and access to dental services.

Access to Dental Services

Ensuring full access to dental services cannot be achieved without providing treatment resources for those with little or no financial support for such services. Beyond that, multiple barriers to access still exist and may be removed through integrating services into already occurring early childhood, family support, and school programs, as well as other natural “touch points.”

Culturally appropriate services that include bi-lingual staff and/or translators facilitate access for all cultural groups. Community specific barriers such as geographical isolation, transportation challenges, generational attitudes toward oral health can be changed through education and logistical support. However, because of a shortage of dentists to treat children, recruitment of dentists to the community and training of dentists to work with young children is essential to ensuring access for all children.

Community Mapping

In order to select meaningful children’s dental health goals, implement successful programs and achieve desired outcomes, it is essential that communities thoroughly consider assets, resources, and barriers relevant to their community and target areas. Exploring other state and community models that match Jackson County’s resources and barriers could yield appropriate program designs and strategies (see cited American Dental Society White Paper at www.ada.org).

References

American Dental Association. *State and Community Models for Improving Access to Dental Care for the Underserved – A White Paper* (2004). Retrieved January 25, 2005, from http://www.ada.org/prof/resources/topics/topics_access_whitepaper.pdf.

Communication Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Brush Up on Healthy Teeth: Steps for Kids’ Smiles, Campaigns and Programs at a Glance* (2005). Retrieved January 28, 2005, from www.cdc.gov/communication/campaigns/brushup.htm.

Dental Health Foundation. *The Oral Health of California’s Children: A Neglected Epidemic*. San Francisco: University of California-San Francisco School of Dentistry, 1993. Retrieved January 23, 2005, from www.dentalhealthfoundation.org/topics/public/index.shtml.

Platt, L., M.D., M.P.H., and M. Cabras, D.D.S., M.P.H. *Early Childhood Dental Caries*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities, 2000.

Web-Based Resources

American Dental Association, www.ada.org.

Dental Health Foundation, www.dentalhealthfoundation.org.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov.